

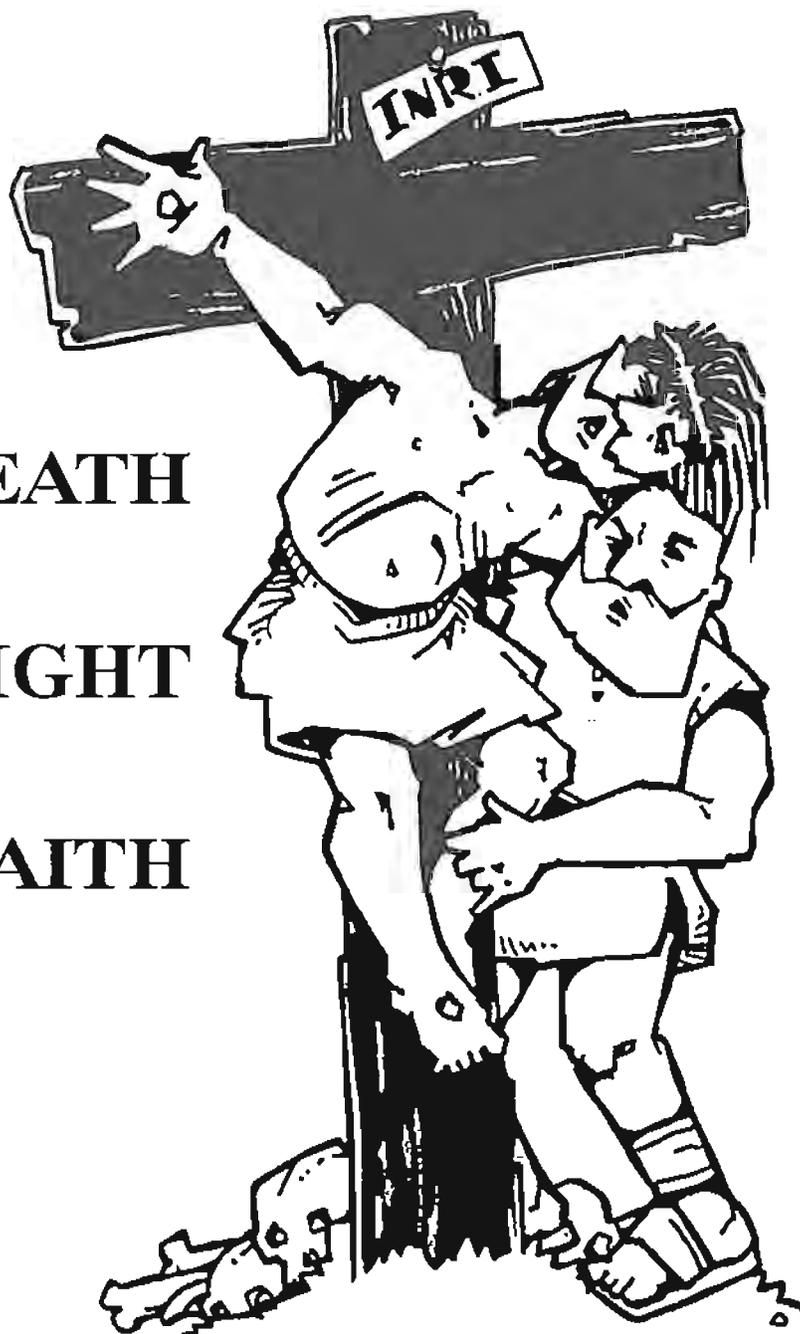
# THE Round Table

Winter  
1996

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." -- Peter Maurin

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## DYING AND DEATH IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH



# WHY THIS ISSUE?

The theme of this issue, dying in the light of faith, is especially meaningful for all who knew Mev Puleo. She was loved by many within and apart from the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community. She died of a brain tumor on January 12, 1996, just shy of her 33rd birthday.

The theme resonates very clearly for me also. My brother Mel died last September after a long battle with cancer, which he fought with great courage.

When I think of dying or death, I often think of a favorite song. In "For A Dancer," Jackson Browne sings, "No matter how close to yours another's steps have grown, in the end there is one dance you'll do alone." To some extent that is true. Each person's death is uniquely his or her own. But in Mel's, Mev's, and Ann Manganaro's passings, I have also seen some of the most supportive sharing imaginable.

It seems to me then, that this issue addresses several questions with grace and candor. How will each of us face our own death? How do those who remain continue in the face of the diminishment and loss of a loved one? What could possibly make such experiences bearable? Perhaps for a time our anger at God or at the unfairness of the loss can pull us through. But ultimately there must be something more.

Each of the writers has a unique perspective to share. The answer that rings through all of them is faith. Fr. Jim Krings invites us to share some of the images he has seen of dying and to see in them the reality that ultimately we belong only to God. Mary Dutcher offers a poignant chronicle of living with her father who has Alzheimer's disease and an aneurysm. The challenges these present are both extraordinary and ordinary.

Mary Hartman writes with gratitude for the examples of some of the thousands of named and unnamed Central American martyrs who died with great faith. In the Centerfold, illustrated by Larry Nolte, Ellen Rehg offers images of the consolation and glory of heaven, a sign that death is only the end of this life. In From Little House, Mary Ann McGivern shares a sustaining moment in her experience of two of her brothers' deaths from AIDS.

Mark Scheu in Round Table Talk reflects on the need to keep faith alive in the darkness that encompasses American society. In From Abroad, James Loney laments the "Common Sense Revolution" which puts Canada's "kinder, gentler society in crisis." Both Mark's and James' articles describe first world societies which seem to be dying, though not in the light of faith.

And finally, we have printed the homily and reflections offered at Mev Puleo's funeral mass by John Kavanaugh, Angie O'Gorman, and Teka Childress so that we can share our thoughts and memories of Mev and her passing and give thanksgiving for her life.

May we all be sustained by the faith, compassion and community expressed in these pages. May we also keep a place in our hearts for those who die alone and unmourned.



- Carol Giles

Front cover and  
centerfold graphics by  
Larry Nolte

## *the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community*

*Karen House  
1840 Hogan  
St. Louis, MO. 63106  
314-621-4052*



*Ella Dixon House  
1540 N. 17th St.  
St. Louis, MO. 63106  
314-231-2039*

# MOVING INTO THE MYSTERY

by Jim Krings

As the messengers from John the Baptizer departed, Jesus began to speak to the crowds: "What did you go out to the wasteland to see—a reed swaying in the wind? Tell me, what did you go out to see—someone luxuriously clad? Remember, those who dress luxuriously are to be found in royal palaces. Why then did you go out to the desert—to see a prophet? A prophet indeed, and something more." Matthew 11:7-9

When The Round Table editors asked me to reflect on dying from illness, nearly immediately I thought of the wonderful scene in the movie, "Mass Appeal." A crusty pastor and his deacon trainee were discussing their recent visit with a family at a funeral parlor. The young deacon was indignant that the pastor had mouthed pious platitudes instead of addressing the real issues of the family's grief and loss. He proposed a wide array of theories and strategies that would force the family to engage all the psycho-social dimensions of the death they were grieving.

The pastor looked at him in amazement and said something like this: "You don't get it, do you? At a time like this, you're supposed to utter inane clichés. You're supposed to feel foolish. Otherwise, you'll look like you really are embracing the enormity of death. And then people will truly be inconsolable because you snatched from them their one possible consolation: that the chaos, confusion, and hope they're feeling really and genuinely is beyond the power of their human comprehension."

More reflectively, but in a similar vein, Thomas Moore, in Care of the Soul, challenges the human tendency to reduce the enormities of human life to any theory. With all truly spiritual issues, "the intellect

wants a summary meaning. But, the soul craves depth of reflection, many layers of meaning, nuances without end" (page 235); and images, images everywhere abound.

Thus, the initial story from Matthew's Gospel becomes an imaginative "storehouse" as we move together into the mystery of dying from illness. If we are willing to go into the wasteland that we name death, what can we expect to see? Surely not words or theories swayed by the winds of current opinion or polls or political correctness. Surely, too, we ought not to expect to see in death someone luxuriously clad. In fact, alongside all our positive Catholic liturgical changes, e.g. the Easter candle of triumphant resurrection or clothing the casket in the white garment of baptismal joy, every funeral still bears in itself the poignancy of an unsung "Dies Irae" and the unworn black vestments of utter grief.

What then can we expect to see if dying becomes our desert prophet? All I can share is what I myself have come to see in the dyings of illness...images all. I can only invite you then to accompany me, to attend to your own wisdoms and images. There is no "it" that faith is meant to see in dying; rather, dying breaks open our faith and faith breaks open our death, and it is God Who becomes visible.

I remember Ollie's death. I didn't want to be there and I had told people that. My own cancer recovery was still too fresh and fragile. I was troubled at how wasted Ollie had become, how often he was confused or unresponsive, how long his dying was taking. I called his son one Sunday morning, seeking "absolution" for my lack of courage. Jimmy, of course, offered it and

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Fr. Jim Krings, a priest of St. Cronan parish, rides his bike to St. Mary's Health Center, where he is a chaplain.

then said, "Oh, Jim, anything you're able to do for dad is always enough."

An hour later, I found myself driving to the hospital, freely choosing but being led where I knew I really didn't want to go. As I entered the room, a John Wayne movie was playing on the TV. Ollie had always loved John Wayne and watching his movies with his children. The family was gathered near, quiet and attentive to every change in Ollie's breathing and demeanor.

Within ten minutes, he opened his eyes, turned to each one of us as we surrounded his bed...and died. All that I had hoped to avoid had happened. I was stunned, though, at a peace I had never expected, or even imagined (Eph. 3:20-21), about death. There was a wholeness to it so that, even as his breathing had stopped and the staff pronounced him dead, Ollie was not really gone. There was his abiding presence that made the room utterly lacking in fear. There was a cleanness and purity in our prayer and weepings that bespoke the touch of grace, God's and Ollie's.

There are other images too, like those of Angela and John. Angela, an environmentalist, television producer, artist, dancer, daughter, sister, friend, knew that her death was drawing near. Her energies, so long committed to recovering, were now leading her towards dying with integrity, fidelity and completion. We visited about dying, what it felt like, looked like, and how to see/find God somewhere in it.

She described so many crushing losses of function, strength and coordination. One day she quietly

explained: "I haven't danced in so long; I'll never dance again." She wept briefly, but then stood up. She tottered into the next room with its hardwood floor and attempted a ballet turn. She stumbled, righted herself, and said, "Wait, let me try it again." She did and it was perfect. She sat down and said, "Now, that's done."

Dying was, for Angela, an entire parade of experiences of being stripped down to her deepest self/worth/meaning. All her gifts and talents and loves, as true and descriptive of her as they were, were now so many treasures being tucked away as she was stripped to her defining human worth and dignity. She was loved and she was God's.

And, then my dear friend, John May. I can still see the sheets of paper he showed me one day, on which he had been attempting his signature, all in varying degrees of *unsuccess*. He had prided himself on concluding his correspondence with a handwritten note and his personal signature. Now even that piece of himself was being taken from him. His inability to maintain this signature piece of his ministry was a most difficult stripping that, with humble difficulty, he worked and prayed to accept. Eventually, with his resignation, his movement to a nursing facility, his dependence on others for the most basic of bodily care, he too was brought to the absolute vulnerability and defining dignity of belonging ultimately and only to God.

Dorothy Day expressed similar sentiments about her own dear friend, Peter Maurin, words that speak and picture truth for us all. "Peter had stripped himself but





there remained work for God to do. We are to be pruned as the vine is pruned so that it can bear fruit, and this we cannot do ourselves. God did it for him. He took from him his mind, the one thing he had left, the one thing perhaps he took delight in. He could no longer think. He could no longer discuss with others, give others, in a brilliant overflow of thought, his keen analysis of what was going on in the world. The fact was, he had been stripped of all." (By Little and By Little, page 124). So too for John and Angela, for Thea and Liz, for Roger and Frank, for N. and N. Dorothy captures the bodily shrinking, the wasting away, the loss of faculties, the confusion and delirium, the lack of any apparent dignity when only Love can find comeliness (see Isaiah 53:2ff).

Still, there is more: another image of dying that arose in my eyes of faith at the death of my Aunt Joanne a long time ago. Somehow I had been the nephew lucky

enough to take her to her radiation therapy sometimes and to visit with her about dying as the end drew near. Aunt Jo was humorous, brave, and confident; attentive, too, to leaving things in order for her family as much as she could. She looked forward to heaven as both a wonderful relief and long anticipated reunion with my grandpa, her "daddy."

Preparing her memorial mass, I discovered an image, only vaguely remembered, but now taking full shape within me: dying is not unlike twins learning life in their own mother's womb. When the time of birthing arrives, the accustomed rhythms of their womb abode are shaken. As the chaotic pushings unfold, one twin is burst forth into light of day where there is rejoicing, gratitude and ecstatic relief that a child has been born into the world. However, if you can imagine the twin still within, what does it look like there but loss and death? My companion is gone, I am sad and abandoned; my womb home will never be the same again. Indeed, their reunion occurs soon enough as the second child comes forth, too. But for an instant, the twinkling of an eyed (1 Cor. 15:52ff), there is only grief and loss.

So, too, for us with the eyes of faith. The death of a loved one is new birth to new life, to new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21) while we, the living, are left behind, aggrieved...as we must still await our own liberating journey of the path of death which is, in fact and in faith, eternal Birth.

Finally, though, dying calls us to pray. Our eyes of faith lead us to believe; but also, to cry out where we can't (Mark 9:24). I was paged one morning at 3 a.m. to be with Francis and his sister as he died. She had had only a month to come to terms with his terminal diagnosis and impending death. She loved him so faithfully, comforting him with words and caresses to the very end. He died so peacefully and nearly trancelike, her soul continued to hold him near... or, perhaps, he held her.

Later, as we sat in a waiting room, she began to speak of him: his youth, his joys, his disappointments, his foibles, his pleasures, the whole picture of who he was. What I most realized was that I was now in the presence of Prayer. While her words were spoken aloud to the space between us, she was actually addressing God. She was praying her gratitude, her grief, her hope, and her confidence in God's good wisdom to first create and now to receive her brother.

And, in truth, isn't that where seeing with the eyes of faith leads us? In all our dyings and grievings, our conversations and consolations, our liturgies and luncheons; in all the particularities and commonalities of anyone dying, we are led to the many faces and ways that the living God creates, guides, and receives into Life. †

# LIVING WITH LOSS

by Mary Dutcher

I think of my father, 86 years old, with Alzheimers, and of how vulnerable he is. Vulnerable, slightly transposed, is venerable: holy. Being almost 50 years of age myself, I become aware of how “vulnerable/venerable” I am--and, in fact, we all are. So one primary effect of living with my father in his vulnerability is that I have been “gentled.” I know I am a gentler person now than I was a year ago when he first moved to St. Louis from Iowa to live with me, and this has to do with my heightened awareness of how vulnerable we all are.

I remember Jesus’ words to Peter about how when he was young he did what he wanted and went where he pleased but that when he was old, a rope would be put around his waist and he would be led where others directed him. These words assume a special poignancy when I realize my dad is now virtually incapable of going anywhere on his own. Even when I try to give him his choice about something that he theoretically could choose--such as, for example, whether to have soup or salad at a meal--he wants me to decide: “Whatever you think is best,” he invariably says.

It reminds me of the painful struggle that occurred about four years ago when my father was no longer capable of driving. The car certainly must have represented his independence, and the violence of his resistance to giving it up clearly relates in my mind to the difficulty of this process of letting go. My dad’s anger so frightened the professional staff where he lived, that on two occasions he had to be hospitalized and

medicated; and he still takes these medications. He did not choose to go gently into that dark night and did indeed rage.

I bring it up because I believe it’s a process that we all must ultimately experience, whether it be the “little deaths” of loss and diminishment or the ultimate “capital-D” death. Carl Jung says something about our spending the first half of our lives constructing our ego and the second half in learning to let it be transformed. “Unless the seed fall in the ground and die...”

The hope I have experienced is from being with my dad, now, after the struggle about diminishment and loss is, for all intents and purposes, finished. He lives very much in the present; it is about all he is capable of. He knows his name. He knows his birth date. He knows the grace before meals. But he does not know what year it is or what city he is in or just about anything else.

He gives great smiles and hugs and most of the time is happy, though. He’s always ready to help. “Can I help you with that?” “Here, let me help you put on your coat.” “Let me hold that door for you.” He is always ready to get up in the morning, sometimes even singing, and takes a shower when requested even though he doesn’t want to.

The difficult times for him now center around two things: either a break in routine that makes him anxious or his slipping out of the present moment. The most frequent and painful example of the latter is when he asks where his wife/my mother is. She died more than three years ago. After great tumult of conscience--the

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Mary Dutcher, Round Table proof reader, should be notified of any errors found in this issue.

choice being whether to upset him terribly by telling him she's dead or to lie to him--my sister and I have resolved the matter by making California a synonym for heaven. "She's in California." And really, we say to ourselves, for most Americans, California is about the closest thing there is to heaven. This resolution seems to be working well, probably in great part because we don't feel like we're really lying.

The anxiety he experiences from a break in routine is usually best handled by slightly increasing his tranquilizing medication. I am so grateful for Dr. Julie Renner, St. Louis University geriatric psychiatric pharmacologist, and to Emily LaBarge of Washington University's Memory and Aging Project, who referred me to her. Dr. Renner has altered my father's medication schedule, primarily by decreasing the dosages; and my father is both calmer and happier as a result. Witnessing this transformation has raised to my mind once again the great conundrum of altering states of consciousness by introducing synthetic substances. I believe it is appropriate in my father's case, but I still feel slightly uncomfortable about this whole issue.

The other medical intervention about which decisions had to be made during the last year concerned the abdominal aneurysm that was discovered in my dad's first physical exam in St. Louis. It seemed relatively obvious not to have surgery performed. The surgery is complicated, intense and invasive--more invasive than open heart surgery, someone told me. One horror story made the decision clear for me: a nurse who works with the elderly told me about an 85-year-old man who had the surgery and who never left the hospital. He spent a year in great pain and then died. I am grateful to Fr. Jim Krings and Dr. Vito Mantese from St. Cronan parish who gave of their time and counsel in the early days of shock at the discovery of the aneurysm. Tom Mullins of St. Cronan and his wife have also generously responded in a couple of emergency situations, and Tom may be the only new person my dad has met that he seems at times to remember.

Making the initial decision not to have surgery was the easier part, as it turned out. Little did I realize the complication and difficulty that having it respected would entail. My back went out last March. I'm morally certain that it related to the anxiety and urgency with which I was trying to make arrangements protecting my decision before I went out of town for a few days.

As I reflect back on that time, I realize that somehow the fear and anxiety that I was feeling about the aneurysm has lessened in the intervening months. I pray frequently that it not erupt "on my watch." My father goes to adult day care at Red Cross five days a week, and I remind God that there is a nurse there who could handle that situation much more ably and with less

upset than I. Perhaps it is either the passage of time or a trust that my prayer will be answered, or a combination of both: in either event, I am certainly grateful for the increased tranquility I feel.

I also realize that I am writing this article at a special moment. The theme of this particular issue related in no small part to Mark Chmiel and Mev Puleo's move from the Bay Area to St. Louis in August and the subsequent discovery that Mev's brain tumor was getting larger. Mev entered a hospice program; and many of us connected to the Catholic Worker and to St. Cronan attempted to be supportive to Mev and her family. Mev passed away this past Jan. 12th and we miss her dearly. Mev is originally from St. Louis and is an old friend of the Catholic Worker community here. Regular readers of The Round Table may remember the photo essay and interview that Mev did with Dr. Ann Manganaro, SL, a former Catholic Worker community member, in El Salvador shortly before Ann's death from cancer in 1993. It appeared in Ann's memorial issue of The Round Table.

So Ann's and Mev's deaths have brought very much to the forefront of our hearts and minds the processes of dying and death in the light of faith. I found that I could not write this article about my dad without placing it within that larger context, because it is much the same community whose support has enabled me to care for my dad that was also involved with Mev, and because I am encountering dying and death in three very distinct and specific expressions with my dad, with Ann and with Mev. And I cannot think of the dying and death of my father without thinking also of Ann and Mev.

A few months ago it would not have been possible for my dad to get in the car with me and drive to a strange destination without great upset on his part. So it was with some trepidation that we did just that on the day after Thanksgiving, there being no adult day care that day and Mev having invited me to visit with her at her parents' home out in the county, a twenty-minute drive.

I will never forget how beautifully Mev and my father interacted; and it will always be a source of confidence for me in the power of love. I remember describing it at yoga class the following day, where the topic was "heart yoga," and that seemed an appropriate way to describe the interaction between Mev and my dad. Neither one of them had very many words and both had some conceptual difficulties, but there was a profound, powerful and loving communication that was a privilege to witness and that will hearten me for years to come.

So when I reflect on what I have learned in my experience of the diminishment process of my father in that larger context, the first thing that strikes me is how

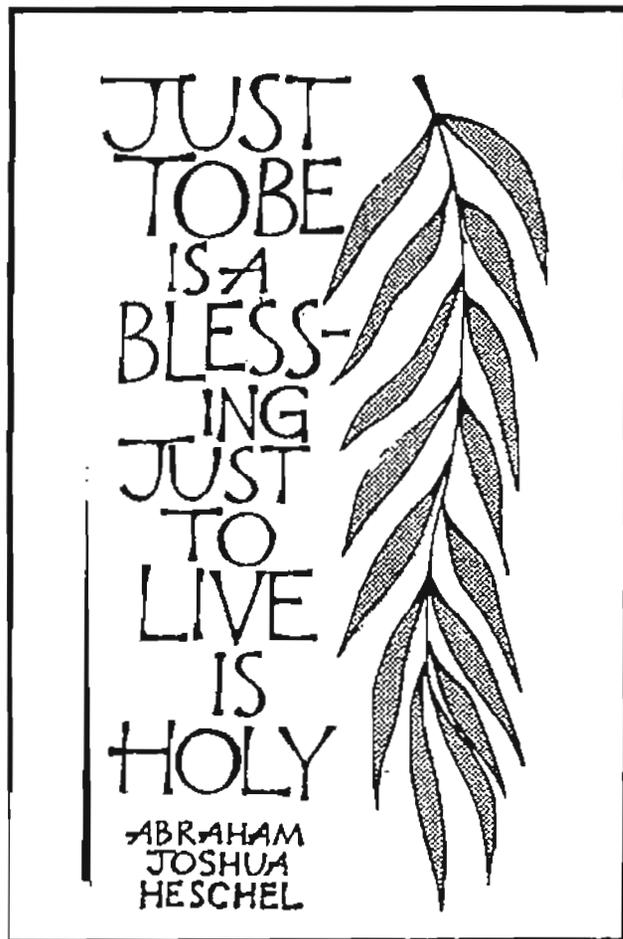
daily and even ordinary the process is as it is lived. Most of the time it's not dramatic. It's a series of doctor's appointments, first of all, that have to be scheduled, arrived at, decided about, etc. A second opinion? And prescriptions. Who's going to order and pick up the prescriptions? Who's going to fill the pill box? My dad takes six different medications that seem to expire on six different schedules, from two different doctors; and three of the medications have capsules that have to be cut in half. So it was a great gift when my sister was visiting in October and did the concrete, specific and daily task of cutting a whole month's supply of pills. The prescriptions are a symbol for all the other activities from eating to dressing that happen daily and ordinarily but just a bit differently when one is ill.

Perhaps the dailyness of it allows it to become more easily bearable, as one day shades imperceptibly into the next and the process of diminishment continues, usually one small symptom at a time. Perhaps that is why I am able to feel more tranquil about my dad's aneurysm now than I was nine months ago.

Another learning is about the importance of love and support. I am convinced that it is not merely the medication changes that my father has had that have allowed him to enter this season of peace that he is experiencing. I believe it is also that he has been hugged more frequently in the last several months by people from the Catholic Worker and from St. Cronan than he had been for years previously. There was a time last winter when I was agonizing about whether we should be going to the St. Louis Cathedral instead of St. Cronan for Sunday liturgy, because the style of church and liturgy at the cathedral was more familiar to my dad; and my dad was sometimes resistant and agitated. We still go to the cathedral sometimes for daily liturgy, but the issue has been resolved for me. I am firmly convinced that the warmth and community that my dad and I experience at St. Cronan's are absolutely essential to us.

Most profoundly, however, as I said at the beginning of this reflection, I have learned gentleness. Experientially living with my father's diminishment and vulnerability causes me to realize my own, and that of others. That, in turn, has given me the gift of gentleness. It may be an instance of the Gospel dynamic of transformation wherein the weak and lowly provide the means for great things: the stone rejected by the builders that became the corner stone... or St. Paul who found his greatest weakness to be his greatest strength.

Dying and death are tremendous mysteries, and much of what we learn goes beyond what can be expressed in words. But holding hands and trying to communicate at least something in the face of these great mysteries seems an expression of love and solidar-



ity. These words by Garrison Keilor about gentleness and community seem an appropriate way to close:

To know and serve God, of course, is why we're here, a clear truth that like the nose on your face is near at hand and easily discernible but can make you dizzy if you try to focus on it hard. But a little faith will see you through. What else will except faith in such a cynical, corrupt time?...What keeps our faith cheerful is the extreme persistence of gentleness and humor. Gentleness is everywhere in daily life a sign that faith rules through ordinary things; through cooking and small talk, through storytelling, making love, fishing, tending animals and sweet corn and flowers, through sports, music and books, raising kids...Even in a time of elephantine vanity and greed, one never has to look far to see the campfires of gentle people. Lacking any other purpose in life, it would be good enough to live for their sake.



# MARTYRS

by Mary Hartman, CSA

The agonized figure of a crucified peasant on a cross speaks vividly of the reality of thousands of human beings in Latin America who have been and continue to be oppressed, persecuted and martyred. In Central America religious, catechists, professionals, peasants and workers of all denominations--Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Mennonite--have died as Jesus Christ did, simply because they lived as Jesus Christ, in the service of the poor. The tragedy of poverty, the horrors of repression and the darkness of injustice have marked the lands of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua as one premature cemetery, where to die and kill is as common as the daily dish of bread and beans.

Invariably, the victims are the poor themselves or those who have protected and supported the poor in their struggle to survive. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer in War Against the Poor denounces vehemently the cruel, low intensity conflict against Christians who seek to live their faith in a God that works for the redemption of all creation and become candidates for martyrdom under the cover of the rhetoric about freedom, democracy and peace. As one Salvadorian peasant and Delegate of the Word protested:

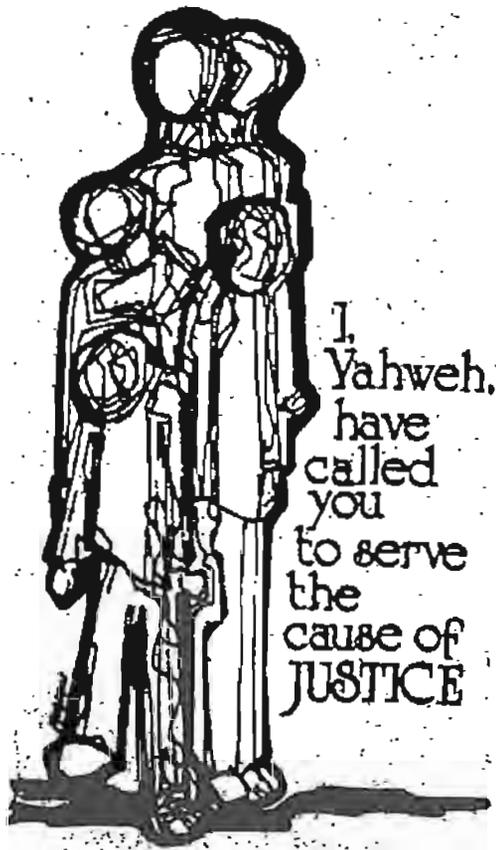
Our crime is to be poor and ask for bread. Here the laws only favor the rich... without land we cannot plant. There is no work. This brings more hunger, more misery. We are without clothes, schools or jobs. But to speak of justice, to ask for bread is subversive. It is a war of extermination. It is a crime to be a Christian and to demand justice.

Such was the case of Ligia Martinez, a Guatemalan teacher, who dedicated her life to help those who had no voice or opportunity--she was silenced. Or the young Guatemalan woman, Dora Clemencia, whose father, husband, and brother were kidnapped and assassinated. When the pregnant Dora began the search for their bodies she, too, suffered the same fate.

Even the majority of the disappeared and assassinated in Central and Latin America are not officially recognized by the church as martyrs. Those who formed community with them, worked with them, knew their commitment to the poor and their willingness to run the same destiny as the poor, see them as martyrs, for like Jesus Himself, they paid the highest price for truth and justice. Everyone remembers the martyrs, Felipe and Mary Barreda, lay pastors in Esteli, Nicaragua. They had organized retreats, lived and worked in a very poor neighborhood promoting Biblical, health and literacy programs. Christmas eve of December 24, 1982, they joined a coffee harvest brigade and Mary left the following note to the community:

We have been awaiting this Christmas with real joy! Since we came to live among you, you have become a part of our lives. We love your children, your streets, your problems--in short everything that is you. The best Christmas gift the Lord could give me would be to share this Christmas with you. But then I suddenly had the chance to give you a very fine present, although it means that I will not be with you at Midnight Mass. It is the chance to pick coffee for ten

Mary Hartman, CSA, pioneer of the open prison movement, has lived on both coasts of Nicaragua and in all sorts of political weather.



days. The little bit I pick will be turned into health care, clothing, housing, roads, education and food for our people--that is why I am enthusiastic about going. In every coffee bean I pick I will see your faces.

Three days later Mary and Felipe were captured by the Contra and recognized as church and civil leaders. They were tied, beaten and insulted. Felipe could hardly walk and was literally dragged by a rope. They spent two days and two nights strapped to the trees, standing, naked and barefoot in the mud and under the rain. In the early morning hours they were shot.

The death of martyrs such as Felipe and Mary has been a great loss, for each of them had in some way reflected the presence of Christ in the community. And always, always when we received news that one of the community had been murdered, feelings of grief and consternation welled up inside, "Why, Lord? How many more? How much can we suffer?" Only in the light of faith can we find an answer, and this does not come easily. It takes time, constant prayer and deep reflection to ease the bereavement. But gradually the feeling of determination and courage comes to continue shoulder to shoulder with the poor, running their same destiny.

Living the truth of the reality is the only way to understand the why of it all. The martyrs took Christ seriously and embraced the cross--the terrible reality of the cross. "If you want to follow Me, take up your cross. People will seize and hurt you, you will be betrayed, some of you will be put to death. Your endurance will win your lives."

Maureen Courtney, a sister of St. Agnes, assassinated January 1, 1990, in Nicaragua expressed all of this so well months before she was killed when she wrote in her journal, "I believe it is most important to stay at the side of the poor in this historical reality--share their destiny, suffer the same vicissitudes, nurture their hopes of progress, collaborate in the human and Christian construction of their future with all the means and energy in our power. I want to walk with them, help them to formulate their questions and articulate their sufferings and misery. I want them to feel the faithfulness of the Lord through me by not abandoning them in the hour of their greatest need. I believe I will die soon...I don't want anyone to be sad, rather rejoice with me that I have been called to give my greatest gift: LIFE. I know that neither my life nor my death will have been in vain. I have come to know our Lord in the manner that He has chose to manifest Himself among the poor. I have confidence he wants me beyond death in a new life."

So what remains for us? The lives of the martyrs, their love, their faith, is all the spiritual food we need to deepen and strengthen our faith and the faith of the community. What a grace to live with people of strong faith, to absorb their example and through osmosis find that our faith is strengthened. The martyrs of Central America had their anchor in God and God's Providence. "Si Dios quiere...Gracias a Dios," was their daily prayer. They believed that God was in control even if they were not. They truly believed that God would never abandon them, nor would God abandon anyone. Somehow, someway the problems of the community would be solved because God was in the midst of them all.

We learned from the martyrs that when one begins to see the truth of things in the light of faith, one begins to live the truth. They have taught us that the true God is the God of the Poor, and this is the reality they responded to. These martyrs did not opt for the poor because they were the most capacitated or because they were saints, but simply because they imitated Jesus Christ. Their faith helped them to imitate a God that opted obstinately for a poor and weak people. He died so justice would shine. The violent form of His death gives testimony of the inhumanity of our societies. As Monsignor Romero so often reminded us, "To convert yourself to the people, you have to run the same destiny

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*"May it be that my  
blood serve as the seed  
of freedom."*

**Oscar A. Romero**

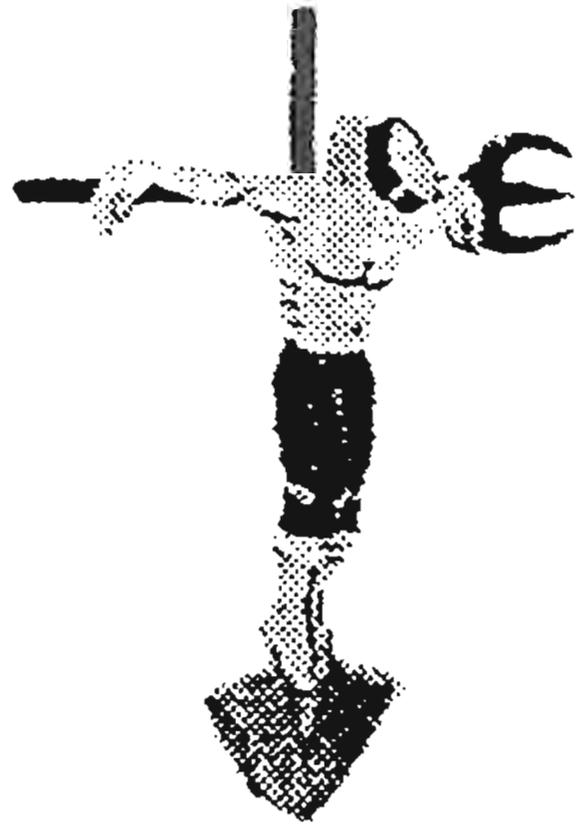
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of the poor; and in El Salvador the destiny of the poor is to disappear, to be captured and tortured and have the corpse appear."

The thousands of martyrs in Latin America are a grace, a glorious grace, the greatest gift of Latin America for the whole universal church. In the 60's, it was above all the political regimes of National Security, the military dictatorships, the death squads that persecuted. In the 80's there was a new repression--the ecclesiastical: the disqualification of the Theology of Liberation, the demonization of the Popular Church, the silencing of theologians, the disciplines given by bishops and cardinals, the expulsion of religious, the prohibition of publications. As Jose Maria Virgil noted, it was easier to follow Jesus when one suffered only from the persecution of powers of this world, but more terrible when the persecution came from the Temple and the Synagogue.

But in spite of the suffering, the threats, life is lived and loved and celebrated. Living the truth that the light of faith reveals brings peace, joy and freedom. The power to live in this world as true human beings, participating in some way in the condition of the majority of humanity, gives us all a truer sense of life--indeed, the pearl of great price. The poor demand we give the best we have--a strong action in their favor, and they in turn give us the best they have, making us all more human and Christian. Responding to this reality, we carry each other mutually.

The courageous people who live and love as Jesus, express their joy in their songs and poetry. "Gracias a la Vida que nos ha dado tanto..." "Thanks to



life that has given us so much..." is sung by all who value life, above all the life of the poor.

We thank you Juan, Margarita, Ita, Maura, Guadalupe, Ignacio, Teresa de Jesus, Celina, Amando, Dorothy, Elba, Jenny, Sergio and the thousand of others who gave their lives that others might live.

No path is long for one who believes  
No struggle is great for one who loves  
No cross is empty for the one who fights.

Sing with joy the dreams of our people  
a miracle of life; the sign of Resurrection.  
There are so many challenges and anxieties to  
overcome.

We have the right to continue dreaming  
We have the obligation to continue dreaming.  
We will fight passionately for our Utopia;  
land for the peasants, work for the unemployed,  
bread, health, house and education for all.  
Because Jesus came for all so that we would have life.

And have it in abundance. (Jn. 10,10)

KAIROS de Nicaragua



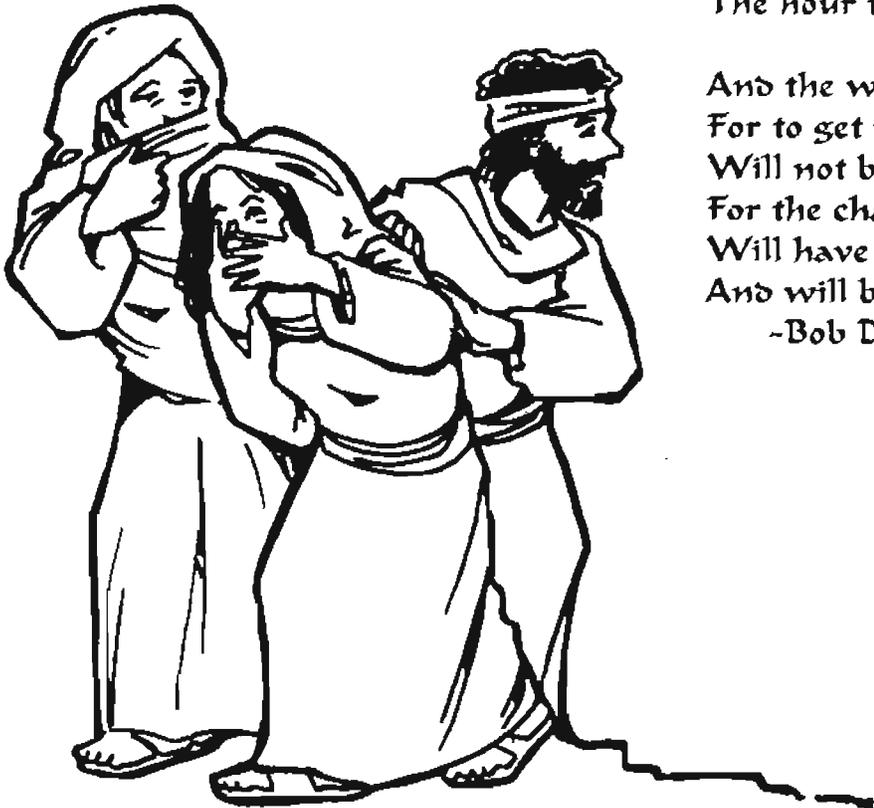
How are we to understand the Church's teaching on heaven,  
personal salvation and immortality of the soul?

These teachings must be related to the wiser and more  
inclusive message of the kingdom. This relation to the kingdom  
enables us to overcome an interpretation of the divine promises  
that makes them exclusively spiritual and private. The kingdom  
of God consists in God's victory over evil in all its forms and  
phases. These promises include the human person's glorious future  
after death; but this future will take place in a context as yet  
unknown and unimaginable, of the world 's new creation...  
Heaven, then stands for God's victory over sin and evil, operative  
in our midst at this time but achieving its completion only at the end.

-Gregory Baum, An American Catholic Catechism

Oh the fishes will laugh  
As they swim out of the path  
And the seagulls they'll be smiling  
And the rocks on the sand  
Will proudly stand  
The hour that the ship comes in.

And the words they use  
For to get the ship confused  
Will not be understood as they're spoken  
For the chains of the sea  
Will have busted in the night  
And will be buried at the bottom of the ocean.  
-Bob Dylan, When the Ship Comes In



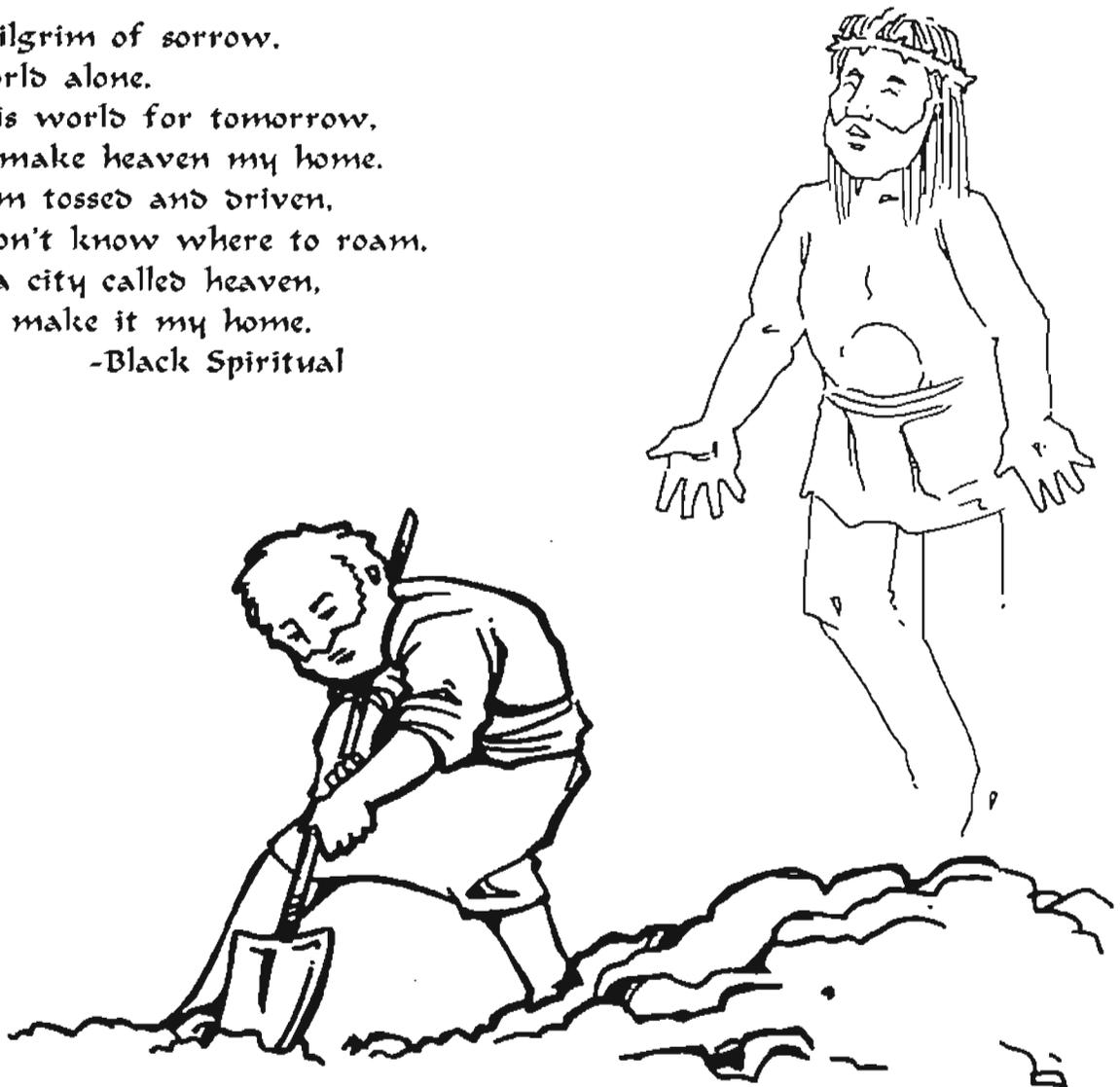
*All the way to heaven is heaven, because he said, I am the way.*  
*-St. Catherine of Sienna*

Glorious beyond compare is the  
heavenly city. There, victory is truth,  
dignity is holiness, peace is happiness,  
life is eternity.

*-St. Augustine, City of God*

I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow,  
I'm in this world alone.  
No hope in this world for tomorrow,  
I'm trying to make heaven my home.  
Sometimes I am tossed and driven,  
Sometimes I don't know where to roam.  
I've heard of a city called heaven,  
I've started to make it my home.

*-Black Spiritual*



# FROM MEV'S FUNERAL LITURGY

*(The following three pieces were delivered at the funeral Liturgy for Mev Puleo on January 15, 1996.)*

## HOMILY

by John Kavanaugh, SJ

The Poor and Love

But most of all, love is all: "yeah yeah," she could say  
and when she could no longer say even that,  
she would give the sign-language of the deaf: for love

It is a love linked, as Isaiah sang, to the poor, the  
oppressed, the hungry  
and planted so early in Mev's own heart and grounded  
in her marriage to Mark with these readings  
from their marriage eucharist

In her last months Mev led us more and more deeply  
into poverty.

It was, as Saint Francis DeSales called it, a destitution  
of love

She had wanted to give the poor a face, a voice  
She always wanted to be identified with them  
And so it came to pass:  
by the time of her last days, you could see them all in  
her face  
—the poor of Bosnia, the hungry of Haiti, the powerless  
of Brazil.

She who gave them voice, lost hers  
She who helped us see their faces, could finally see no  
more.

It was such a long dying, such a terrible, long divest-  
ment of her riches.

She became the poor she loved.  
And now, the Kingdom of Heaven is hers:  
So Nothing of her grace and beauty will be lost. No  
goodness or charm will fade away.

We believe, after all, we Christians  
in the resurrection of her body in life everlasting

As her friends and family saw her great relinquishment,  
their love was kindled all the more  
They entered love's powerlessness, its pain, its joy, its  
happiness.

In her death as in her life and labor, Mev brought us  
more fully into the mystery of it all  
Is there anyone who has ever led us more deeply into  
the poverty of the cross?

Surely Mark knows this, Mark, whom Mev named her  
dearest life companion, deep and  
laughing, she wrote, intelligent and true, bound to her  
in weakness and failures  
as well as bliss and the joy of the spiritual journey.

Surely Peter and Evie know this, entering the wide  
wound of love and poverty  
that every parent must feel:

In an assignment she did eleven years ago for a  
woman theologian, Mev composed a letter to her parents  
(which I'm not sure they ever have seen)

*"I lack the words to communicate my thanks  
and love for you...Having children, bearing them,  
birthing them, raising them, letting go of them, provid-  
ing and caring for them--this is truly the act of 'making  
love.' You gave me Peter, Laura and Rose as brother  
and sisters.*

*You educated me; you taught me courage; YOU  
taught me compassion for the poor...mom, with Our  
Lady's Inn; Dad, with your civic work and service..taking  
blankets to poor people and shut ins: YOU showed me  
what it means to believe in God...what a marriage is all  
about...you taught me social responsibility...but most of  
all, you taught me LOVE."*

Thus, it was her family, just as it was her Mark who  
brought her with the poor, to Christ.

Mr. Puleo on the phone Friday said to someone on the other end: "Well, the one Puleo who did great things for God died today." But it was not accurate

--for the loving spouse who prays the Song of Songs into his wife's ears on the day of her death  
He does great things for God  
--the father and mother who entrust their precious gift of God into God's own hands  
They do great things for God  
--brother and sisters, bearing spouses and children steadfastly to her side  
They bring great news of God  
--Mark's and Mev's dear friends and community, from Boston to California,  
and the Angels of Arco street, who spent weeks of vigils and prayer and comforting and nursing  
Surely they did great things for God.  
Surely they were clothing the poor and feeding the hungry  
Surely they felt the beauty of their love's poorness, their love's great strength.

Mev was like us, actually; and she was like the poor ...She was just more of it, more intensely so  
When she applied to Maryknoll she wrote: "I have an energetic personality. I love and want to get along with people. I am unusually joyous. I have strong convictions.  
My weaknesses are the flip-sides of my strengths. I can be domineering and not invite others.

My extro-vertedness can squelch others' initiative. I often interrupt others in heated discussions. Often times I am proud rather than grateful. I am prone to seek admiration."

What an imperfect jewel, what a sinner she was.  
OH, But what a diamond, what a flame, what a joy,  
what a bearer of the word made flesh

Has there ever been a day we have not been happy to see her?  
No one will ever take her place.  
And if we learned from her, we will realize that no one will ever take our own place

As a college student she wrote: "When I was in my early teens, a thought took hold of me  
Jesus didn't die to save us from suffering--he died to teach us how to suffer,  
to be with us in our every anguish and agony, to give meaning to our pain  
...sometimes I actually mean it.--I'd rather die young, having lived a life crammed with  
Meaning than to die old, even in security, but without meaning."

Such are the dangers of our high and holy desires.  
Such was the splendid danger of Marvelous Mev Puleo,  
spouse, daughter, sister, uncommon friend,  
and teacher of the Church. +



photo by Mark Chmiel

**Mev Puleo**

Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

Let nothing upset you;  
Let nothing frighten you.  
Everything is changing;  
God alone is changless.  
Patience attains the goal.  
Who has God lacks nothing;  
God alone fills all our needs.

*Mev Puleo*

Entered earthly life  
January 26, 1963

Entered eternal life  
January 12, 1996

Mev's memorial card

# REFLECTION

by Angie O'Gorman

Can you picture it? Mev, resting in God's arms. No more tumor, no more pain, no more suffering.

And how long do you think it will take before she rests her hands on God's shoulders, leans in close to God's ear and says, "Listen to women in the church and the poor of Haiti"? Certainly we do not expect Mev to be any less persistent with God than she was with the Pope.

Mev's struggle is over. Ours is not. Even as we are grateful that her suffering has ended, our grief at losing her is immense. Such grief and loss raise up questions in us about "Why?" Why a brain tumor? Why Mev? Why now? And sometimes there is another question, one that we are almost too afraid to ask out loud. Why did God let this happen?

Why did God let this happen? We come back to this question time and again when faced with such unspeakably painful mystery.

We ask it, at least in part, because our faith has been formed in what Mev and others call the first world; the world of might and power and control. In our first world perspective we believe God to be most truly God in victory; in overcoming that which we believe should be overcome.

But that was not Mev's understanding of God. Mev long ago realized that God does not protect us from what life in this limited, physical, and often unjust world can bring, because it is precisely in this context that we are given the opportunity to learn how to love and be loved. In what she and others call the third world--the world of poverty, oppression, and powerlessness, the world Mev knew in Brazil and Haiti and impoverished communities throughout St. Louis--Mev learned that our God does not protect us from this learning. Rather, our God--the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Esther and Ruth and Mary, the God of Jesus--our God participates with us, accompanies us, at the heart of the very struggles life brings. Even in illness. Even in dying.

Who of us who had the privilege of being with Mev and Mark since they moved back to St. Louis last summer can doubt the presence of God even in the midst



photo by Mev Pulco

of Mev's advancing illness? Are we not more gentle, more compassionate people for having accompanied them through these months? Were we not changed in our very capacity to love as we watched Mark and Mev care for each other? Didn't we gaze in awe at Mev's integrity as her own spirit built up and nourished a community around her, even as her physical body was dying? Have we not begun to comprehend more profoundly Mev's own passion for meeting God through a relationship of solidarity with those who suffer?

We have seen the holy in the human at its best.

Yes, our hearts are breaking, but the great grace of how God is with us in our pain is that the breaking need not be a breaking apart. It can be a breaking open: open to the poor who Mev's photographs allow us to see, open to the reality of injustice that creates and sustains such poverty, open to responding in relationship with those who are suffering.

We will honor Mev best not by our grieving--although we will grieve for a long time to come--nor with tributes and awards, although she will receive many. We will honor Mev best by taking her life seriously and allowing her passion for justice and her commitment to the God who struggles with us to become our own.



# REFLECTION

by Teka Childress

Mev had beautiful eyes.

Just look at Michael Bartz's program cover (for Mev's funeral).

And later, even with her hair lost to radiation and chemo-therapy, she was stunning.

She communicated with her eyes—great joy or great frustration.

But she also saw with them.

As most of you know, Mev opened the introduction to her book, The Struggle is One with a description of a bus ride up a hill in Rio de Janeiro with her family when she was fourteen.

She describes looking to one side and seeing beautiful beaches and expensive hotels, while on the other side seeing tremendous poverty, all the while approaching the top of the hill where the statue of Christ the Redeemer loomed over the city.

This experience sparked for Mev a crisis of conscience which she spent her life responding to.

She came to a resolution about how to respond to this crisis and she describes it later in the introduction to The Struggle is One:

"Yes the way up the hill to Christ the Redeemer is a bumpy, sometimes dangerous ride. And I have come to believe that we, the privileged are invited to get off the bus and plant our feet squarely beside the journeying people, walking with the God who is present in those on both sides of the road."

To be a bridge between the people on both sides of the road, to bring the faces of people struggling in Brazil and Haiti, to us here--this was Mev's vocation.

She devoted her tremendous talent as a photographer (inherited from her father), her ability as a speaker and writer,

and the great passion of her heart to this task. And for this we are grateful and often in awe.

Yet, it is important that we not make an icon of Mev, for to do so we would miss Mev in all her wonderful humanity, in all the particular concrete ways that she was Mev.

Mev taught me something very important:

She taught me that when you go to Ted Drewes you can mix all different kinds of flavors together. I would never have dreamed of some of the possibilities she tried.

Mev loved ice cream and she loved desserts--the richer the better, the more varied the better.

She liked lots of variety in her food and loved to sample from her friends' plates or loved to share several orders that were passed around, (a tradition I later learned was one of the Puleo family's).

She was wonderfully fun; even as she was dying she could be really playful and some nights had her friends laughing through the night.

Even while bed-ridden she would have her little stuffed Boo Boo bear dance to the music that was playing.

She gave a thousand different meanings to the word, "Yeah!".

She had an irrepressible spirit.

She had a wonderful conscience.

She was tremendously capable of great love and friendship.

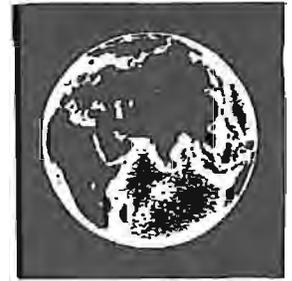
So Mev, we believe you are still with us in spirit and in memory and yet, we will MISS you.

And we long for the day when we can see you face to face and look into your beautiful eyes once again.



Photo of Mark Chmiel and Mev Puleo by Christine Sullivan.

# FROM ABROAD



by James Loney

As Canadians, we love to glance self-righteously down our long national noses at the various failures of the American experience. We congratulate ourselves that, whatever our own agonies and pratfalls, at least we are not like the United States. We imagine ourselves to be a decent self-effacing tolerant folk who are just a little better than most everyone else—more civilized, certainly than our southern neighbours with their ubiquitous hand guns and crime-crumbling cities.

The image of the United States looms large in the Canadian mind. It acts as our foundational reference point, the bulwark of our national identity. We may not know what we are, but we know exactly what we are not. We are not American. Even as we are drawn irresistibly into the imperial orbit of the Pax Americana, we define ourselves against its excesses and extremes and thereby can settle ourselves into a cozy sense of moral complacency. We think of ourselves as having managed to attain that “kinder and gentler” society that continues to elude Americans—a fact confirmed by the United Nations, which consistently rates Canada as the best country in the world to live in.

So we ask for your forgiveness. When Mike Harris and his neo-conservative crew came to power in the province of Ontario in July of '95, replacing the sort-of socialist New Democratic Party (NDP), we couldn't resist. We hung a banner on our house which read, “Welcome to Mike's America.”

This was not intended to be a slam against Americans, but a little jab at our fellow Canadians who falsely pride themselves for being “better” than Americans. For Ontario had just elected a party which was promising to dismantle the little bit of a safety net which

helped to mitigate some of the suffering caused by poverty.

They call it the “Common Sense Revolution”: cut public spending to the bone, cut taxes for the rich, privatize public services, make it easier for business to do business and there will be jobs and prosperity in abundance for everyone. The reason we're in such a mess, they say, is because government has gotten out of hand. Its meddlesome regulations (preventing corporations from employing scab labour during a strike, for example) are legislating business out of Ontario. Government is by definition fat, wasteful and inefficient. We are living beyond our means. The deficit is out of control. We have to cut social programs now in order to ensure their viability in the future. Our children's future depends on it.

And so our kinder, gentler society is in crisis. The “Common Sense Revolution”, a first world version of the “structural adjustment” formulas imposed on countless third world countries, represents the dismantling of Ontario's political culture, which has created a sizeable and relatively efficient public sector on a non-profit basis. Other areas, such as transportation, energy, housing, liquor sales, communications and broadcasting, all have significant public involvement through the agency of various Crown Corporations.

The scope and integrity of public enterprise and social programs in Ontario have meant that we have thus far been able to avoid the social traumas which characterize so much of American society. But in the course of only six months things have taken a nasty turn in this land of the “true, north, strong and free.”

Welfare payments to individuals and single par-

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James Loney is a member of Zacchaeus House, a Catholic Worker community in Toronto, Ontario.

ents have been cut by 21.6%. A single person in Toronto now has to survive on a maximum of \$520.00 a month when the average rent for a bachelor apartment (SRO) is well above four hundred dollars. The Minister for Community and Social Services advises that poor people can always buy dented cans of tuna. To show that it was possible for people on welfare to afford an adequate, nutritious diet, the government issued a monthly menu which, according to The Vancouver Sun, would violate the Geneva Conventions if fed to prisoners of war. Needless to say, food banks (unheard of in Canada only 15 years ago) are reporting an unparalleled increase in the need for their services.

In addition, halfway houses for prisoners and battered women's shelters have been closed. Transfer payments to municipalities are being cut by almost 50%. Twelve of Toronto's 44 hospitals are slated to be closed. Education budgets are being slashed. Rent controls are being lifted, while funding for all new co-op and non-profit housing projects has been cut. Plans are afoot to turn all public housing over to the private sector. Health care is being opened to for-profit corporations, many of them American. 20,000 civil servants are scheduled to be laid off. The best legal-aid program in Canada is being gutted (lawyers are not even being paid for work they have already done!). Environmental and planning laws are being emasculated. There is talk of privatizing

Ontario Hydro, the largest utility in North America, and the Ontario Liquor Control Board, which generates over half a billion dollars a year for the public purse. User fees for everything from garbage collection to libraries to fire protection are being considered. The sad and depressing litany goes on and on. It's just like one of those dramatic post-Christmas commercials: "Everything must go!"

Yup. "The times they are a changin'." The chickens have come home to roost in the coops of Canadian self-righteousness. The Canadian public, primed by the "deficit-reduction" hysteria which is promulgated as "news" by the media, grumbles but seems resigned to accept its fiscal fate. The Canadian political spectrum, while broader than that of the U.S., is marked by an alarming poverty of political imagination. There are few signs of alternatives or effective resistance; I am not terribly hopeful.

As an anarchist, my faith does not reside in Holy Mother the State to solve the problems wrought by capitalism. However, the state in Ontario has managed to make life a little less "nasty, brutish and short" for those our capitalist system has rendered expendable; and it has made the border between Canada and the United States something of a reality. I fear that our future is being mirrored for us by our friends south of the 49th parallel.

+



photo by Mev Puleo

# FROM KAREN HOUSE



by Scott Stauffer

This year was my second Christmas at Karen House and like the first it was both an exciting and frustrating time. It was exciting because so many former community members and supporters lent a helping hand and shared tremendously of their time and resources. It was frustrating because it was so busy, and there was such an overabundance of things and activity at this one time of the year.

The other day, in my work for Coro, I came across the description of a commonly done procedure. Even though this particular procedure describes something else, I think it appropriately conveys many of the Christmas season tasks that are done at Karen House. (As you read, see if you can guess what this procedure actually describes; the answer is listed below.)

*"The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. . . It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. Eventually. . . the whole cycle will have to be repeated. However, this is part of life."*

Whether it is answering the phone or front door, responding to our guests' requests, putting away boxes of donations, giving out sandwiches, planning meals, cleaning the kitchen, or choosing and wrapping Christmas gifts--there is always some "procedure" that needs attention almost hourly during the holiday season.

I would like to think that it is through these many cycles that we discover such profound hope and joy in the celebration of Christ's birth. To me, the work of "procedures" is another way to share a meal or break bread together, another opportunity to exchange gifts; a

way to celebrate Christ's birth. However, with this joy and hope also come some profound problems. In some ways, the abundance of gifts, donations and volunteers that we receive can be a quick fix or high, something to make the pain go away--**temporarily**. There is no structural change in the economic struggles our guests endure, no permanent solutions to the oppression, discrimination and poverty, and no real economic opportunities. What would it be like if the resources and energy we receive at Karen House during the Christmas season could be transformed into economic opportunities, real jobs, stable and sufficient income, and safe homes? Maybe we could create some kind of cottage industry where our guests and neighbors (and us) could bit by bit rebuild a new society in the shell of the old, as Peter Maurin used to say.

Recently, we started having some Round Table discussions about these very questions, ideas and dreams. We have been talking about the vision of the Catholic Worker Movement and how it is expressed at Karen House, identifying ways we can share the "running of the house" with our guests and volunteers; figuring out how we can continue to offer hospitality with a shrinking community; and dreaming about what could be if ...

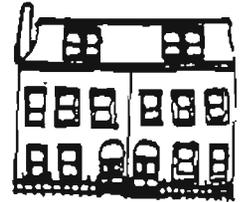
Like some of the characters in Alice in Wonderland, we are asking ourselves, "Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice. 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat. 'I don't much care where,' said Alice. 'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat." We very much care where we go from here and have a pretty good idea of where we want to end up; but we haven't quite figured out how to get there. We need your input, ideas and support. So come join us the first Tuesday of every month from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for some thought-provoking conversation and action about how God radically calls us to transform our lives and communities. See you there! +

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Scott Stauffer is trying to teach himself how to play the harmonica, and we can't wait until he learns another song than "Oh, When the Saints Go Marching in."

# FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



Ten years ago this past January second, I had a transcendent experience of mystical suffering that sustained me through my brothers' illnesses and deaths from AIDS. The intensity of the moment stayed with me for a long time; but eventually it faded, leaving me only the memory in words, the knowledge that it did happen, without access any more to the tangible knowledge of God.

My brother Joe had been diagnosed with full blown AIDS in 1984, and, because I was doing freelance writing, I had been able to go to New York each time he was very ill to care for him. Now he was clearly dying. He went to Chicago to spend Christmas with my mother and brothers. I stayed in St. Louis and worked, purchasing a ticket to fly to Chicago on the day after New Year's to pick Joe up, accompany him back to New York, and stay for some weeks--indeed until his death five weeks later.

On New Year's Day, my brother Peter called me in St. Louis to tell me that our youngest brother Frank, who had returned to his New York job a few days earlier, had been diagnosed with AIDS that morning and was in Beth Israel hospital, getting treatment for pneumocystic pneumonia. I said, "Oh, shit." I wished right away my first response had been more elevated, but it was from the heart. Frank was gay and he had been ill; but this was before HIV-testing, and we'd all been denying Frank's symptoms.

Joe was very weak, but when we got to La Guardia, he said he felt strong enough to go directly to the hospital to see Frank. I hailed a cab and we went first to Joe's apartment, where I hauled our stuff inside while Joe waited in the cab. The hospital was just nine blocks away; and when we got out, Joe, who'd been a patient there several times and who had talked to Frank that morning, led the way directly to his room. I was by Joe's side, ready with an arm to steady him; and then he walked into Frank's room and hugged him and made a wisecrack about the kosher food.

I stood in the doorway and watched them both, suddenly engulfed in a bleak grey vision of their funerals.

I couldn't move. I was unable to respond to them or care for them or even to step forward out of the doorway and into the hospital room.

Then a choir of voices said, or maybe sang, "We are with you," and I knew the voices were human beings who were suffering or had suffered terrible things and yet were able, I didn't question how, to transcend their own suffering, or perhaps to use it in support of me and my two brothers. My heart lifted. I could walk again. It couldn't have been more than five seconds, not as long as it takes to read this single paragraph, that's the point of my story.

I stepped forward and hugged Frank and swirled to model my fur coat, a Worker donations gift from Virginia and Ann and Pat. Frank laughed, and we all three began to talk. And within myself, even as we talked about food and doctors and plans for tomorrow, I marveled that I had been given someone else's strength to live in this moment and treasure it and let the future bring what funerals it would.

Later I described it to myself as a choir of the Church of Suffering, a little like Dante's penitents in Purgatory singing while they climbed the mountain. Or maybe a wellspring of Sandanista prayer of the cries of mothers whose children had died. Because of that moment I know with all my heart and soul that prayer changes experience and that in our sorrow we can stand with others and be redeemed. I'm telling this story here to honor and thank those who prayed for me ten years ago and to better remember myself that moment of grace and my own power and promises to pray for you.

Another way for us to remember and honor those whose suffering joins with Jesus to redeem us is to gather in the morning before work on May first, the Catholic Worker birthday, at the Little House, to plant sunflowers in the lot across the street. Please buy a packet of giant sunflower seeds, any variety, just so they are giants, and start them in potting soil in February. By the first of May, they will be ready to thrive in a city lot and, come August, a field of sunflowers lifting their faces to God will lighten all our hearts. +

Mary Ann McGivern, SL hopes you receive this RT before the **Charlie King Concert** on March 1st at 7:30 pm at Tegeler Hall (3550 Lindell) and that you attend.

Dear Round Table:

Thank you for your Fall 1995 *Round Table* on homosexuality. Your collection of essays was in-depth, enlightening, and offered diverse perspectives. This is an issue that seems to get avoided in Catholic Worker circles. Again, thanks.

Shalom,  
Dave Maciewski  
Catholic Worker  
Worcester, Massachusetts

Dear RT:

Thanks for the issue on homosexuality. I thought your panel discussion on the statement from the Toronto CW worked splendidly, and that your respondents made valuable contributions. Still, I'd like to raise some issues.

Although my former partner in community, Ellen Rehg, made many helpful points, she also criticized the Toronto piece for being "polemical." I can find no evidence of the aggressive attacks that define polemics; I think the statement is even-handed, self-reflective, and disciplined.

More troublesome was Ellen's critique of Toronto for promoting an open-minded approach to the morality of various "patterns of loving." I think it was a mistake for Ellen to remove the "patterns of loving" phrase from the context in which the Toronto CW used it: in a discussion of a morally responsible, sexually active homosexuality that is one possible "pattern of loving." Even a cursory reading of the Toronto statement shows they were promoting nothing more, and nothing less.

What is troubling then is that Ellen finds it helpful to introduce pedophilia, sado-masochism, polygamy, and menage a trois into the discussion. Clearly that is not what the Toronto CW was referring to, and there is nothing in their statement that even hints otherwise. Since it is unlikely that Ellen actually thinks that homosexual sex is apt to include pedophilia, sado-masochism, polygamy, and menage a trois, it seems she lapsed into the argumentative tactic of introducing red herrings, or more to the point, "deviant" gay straw people. But to do this is not without cost to the other, in this case, the lesbian and gay communities.

An important principle of nonviolence is to try and put oneself in the shoes of the other. Imagining how a gay person would feel to pick up *The RT* and to once again have their sexuality linked in the public eye to child sexual abuse, the infliction of physical pain, and to multiple simultaneous partners ought to give us pause.

Ellen concludes that we should approach these issues with more clear thinking and fewer polemics. Here my friend and I agree. I also think that we ought to be vigilantly sensitive to the many oppressions facing the lesbian and gay communities, doing nothing to further the stereotype of homosexual sex as violently abusive and uncommitted.

Peace,  
Patrick G. Coy  
Syracuse, N.Y.

Reply by Ellen Rehg

Dear Pat,

You misunderstood my point, but I'm glad to have this opportunity to clear it up in case anyone else also thought I was trying to link homosexuality with the other practices mentioned. The phrase "pattern of loving" was used in the article in a definition of heterosexism offered by Audre Lorde. She defined it

## FROM OUR MAILBAG

in part as the belief in the superiority of one pattern of loving; and this is what my comments were directed to. My objection is that the phrase "pattern of loving" is too vague and broad. It could possibly include any sexual practice. In my article I then simply listed what some of those practices were, to make the point that they also could be called "patterns of loving." It was not my intention to suggest that there was somehow a link between homosexuality and the others mentioned. I could easily say that heterosexual (rather than homosexual) love as well as a menage a trois could be encompassed by this phrase. In other words, for the purpose of my point, you can substitute "heterosexual" for "homosexual" in that part of my article.

The rest of my point is that if you're going to use a definition that seems to encompass any sexual practice, then we ought to be able to make claims about the superiority of some over others, in my opinion. The philosophical subtext here is my resistance to Lorde's postmodern assumptions about standards of value being necessarily domineering.

Dear Round Table:

We were quite disappointed with most of the views presented on homosexuality in your Fall 1995 issue...

We find that many people often emphasize the "God of love" over, and to the exclusion of, the "God of justice." The fact is, our supremely Holy God can't stand sin. This includes lying, pride, idolatry, covetousness and sexual sins (adultery, fornication, and yes, homosexuality), among many others...

We believe homosexuality is clearly spoken against in the Bible, both Old and New Testament...

Teka Childress' comments were disturbing in that she chooses to "discern the truth about things by examining the reality presented to us in nature and in our experiences." I find that left to ourselves and our own reasoning and logic, [people] make a mess of things. Whatever happened to appealing to the Source of Truth, as found in the Scriptures, instead of relying on ourselves? If society becomes so twisted (as ours is fast becoming—"Woe to those who call good evil and evil good!"), then what we observe there is "in nature and in our experiences," does that then become our Truth? Is there no Absolute, Unyielding Truth? We maintain there is, and it is not found in the whims and reasonings of man...

In closing, we do not hate homosexuals; it is their sin we hate, just as we hate pride or lying or idolatry in ourselves and in anyone else we meet. We want to love them where they are, as Jesus does, yet to encourage them to leave their life of homosexuality.

To that end, We have enclosed for your staff, articles that are biblically based dealing with this topic.\* I pray that all of you will peruse or read them with an open mind and allow the Spirit's light to penetrate your minds and hearts on this sensitive issue.

Sincerely,  
Rich and Kari Frey

\*If you would like a copy of these articles, write to *The RT*.

by Mark Scheu

I visit a tobacco shop in Clayton about once every two months to replenish my stock of pipe tobacco. When I first came to St. Louis and discovered this particular shop I relished these visits. The greater part of this small and cramped shop was given over to displays of pipes and various mixtures of tobacco. There were two small cases of cigars which were relatively inconspicuous (especially as I'm not much of a cigar smoker). The proprietor was always fun to exchange barbs with. He was engaging, had a sharp wit, and made an effort to relate to his customers on a personal basis. The shop was frequented by an informal, unpretentious and friendly clientele.

But over the last several years all of this has changed dramatically. The most visible change is the conversion of the shop's very limited space from pipe displays to cigar cases—even a large, self-contained, walk-in case with a sliding glass door. Consequently the amount of space devoted to pipes is greatly diminished. I no longer look forward to my visits. I find the proprietor is either busy in the back entering figures into a computer, presumably keeping track of his inventory, or is absorbed with a well-heeled and formally-dressed customer, presumably a Clayton businessman. The proprietor no longer bothers to strike up a conversation with me. Clearly there is now a pecking order established among the customers. If you wear a suit and tie and are in the habit of purchasing expensive cigars, you will be given first class service. This type of customer is now quite common in the shop, whereas before such was a rarity.

All this reflects a shift in the tobacco shop's market. Almost anyone can afford to smoke a pipe. Bulk pipe tobacco, even of good quality, is inexpensive—cheaper than smoking cigarettes, for example. But cigars are an entirely different matter. Good cigars are very expensive and obviously cater to a luxury market. That market has grown vastly in the 1990's. Cigar smoking has always been the trademark of wealth and complacency, and for good reason. Readers of the trade magazine CIGAR AFICIONADO have an average household income of \$194,000! I'm not suggesting that everyone who smokes a cigar is rich and unconcerned with the ills of society, but the stereotype is not without foundation. Conspicuous consumption is very much fashionable again. There is no shame attached to great wealth nor in the desire to indulge in it and display it. It wasn't too long ago that there was a real stigma attached to such extravagance. Times have changed.

What has happened in that tobacco shop is but a microcosm of what is taking place society-wide. We have entered dark times. The rich feel justified in monopolizing ever greater portions of the nation's wealth, while the poor are blamed for their own plight. It's perfectly acceptable to cut

AFDC and the food stamp program, but outlays for the B-2 bomber are sacrosanct. It's popular to balance the budget on the backs of the poor, but we should further reduce the capital gains tax. Buffoons like Rush Limbaugh are dangerous because they are taken seriously. Our armed forces are heralded as peacekeepers. The agenda of the corporate elite goes virtually unchallenged.

Recently I joined a prayer/demonstration in Forest Park centered on peace-making, especially in regard to our ongoing persecution of the people of Iraq. There are not many of these events anymore, and when one does occur not many people turn out. The unspoken pressure to conform, not to challenge the status quo, not to question the official channels of information, not to confront the powers that be, not to refuse homage at the alters of the state religion, has grown enormously. I'd always looked forward to and enjoyed a gathering like that in Forest Park, but now I really have to push myself to attend. Whereas a decade or so ago one easily felt swept along in a stream of radicalism and there was a sense of pride in being civilly disobedient, now one has to fight off a sense of shame, of being terribly out of step, of appearing ridiculous, of being alone.

A pall has descended over the conscience of this nation. Those who can summon the courage not to be cowed by this dark cloud are truly voices crying in the wilderness. Make no mistake about it, these are dark times. In THE WIZARD OF OZ, as Dorothy and her companions enter the forest, one remarks apprehensively how dark it is becoming, to which I believe the scarecrow replies, "I think it's going to get a lot darker before it gets any lighter." Our situation is similar. Our chief task now is simply to keep the faith alive. That is ambitious enough in these times. If one can manage not to withdraw from the struggle for true peace and a just world that is sufficient. If one can resist the temptation to surrender to cynicism, to give way to consumerism, to build up the safety of one's private world while neglecting the public (temptations I know all too well), that may be challenge enough. During such times it is essential to abandon any trace of triumphalism if we are to preserve our faith, to recall that the important thing is not to succeed, but to be faithful. God, and only God, will do the rest.

Even as I write this, the darkest day of the year approaches—the winter solstice. I love winter, but I do not care for the short days and long, dark nights. The struggle for a just world has entered such a time. It seems as if the darkness continues to encroach upon what little light there is left to us. Now is the time to stoke the fires of our faith in order to keep the light of an alternative world bright, despite the surrounding darkness.



Mark Scheu now owns a house in Dogtown.

**Don't miss:**

**Charlie King**

Concert to benefit the St. Louis Economic  
Conversion Project.

Friday March 1, 1996 at 7:30 p.m.

St. Louis University Tegeler Hall  
3550 Lindell blvd.

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**Irish Imports '96**

Friday March 15, 1996 at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday March 16, 1996 at 8:00 p.m.

Incarnate Word Academy Theatre  
2788 Normandy drive.

Tickets available at the door,  
Catholic Supply,  
and The College Church rectory.

**Of Note:**

Guy Gagliardi, a long time supporter who for years carried donations from AARP to Karen House, died recently.

William Miller, biographer of Dorothy Day and long time professor at Marquette University, died in December.

Gabriel Joseph Rehg-Miller was born into the family of Ellen Rehg, Bill Miller and Myrrah Rehg on December 17, 1995. He came into the world at a whopping 9 lbs., 14 oz.

**House needs:**

- ♦ **House takers**
- ♦ Sandwiches
- ♦ Kitchen utensils
- ♦ Silverware
- ♦ Pampers

"I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens." Woody Allen

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Teka Childress, Mary Dutcher, Jeff Finnegan, Mitch McGee, Bill Miller, Ellen Rehg, Mark Scheu, Annjie Schiefelbein, and Scott Stauffer. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

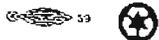
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**The Round Table**

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